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CHURCH UNION IN JAPAN.

BY

REV. DANIEL CROSBY GREENE, D. D.

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CHURCH UNION IN JAPAN.

IN the month of September, 1872, about six months after the organization of the first Protestant congregation in Japan, a convention of missionaries was held in Yokohama. To this convention all missions at that time at work in the country had been invited, but only representatives of three missions were actually in attendance, those of the American Presbyterian Church (North), the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America, and the American Board, though two Episcopal clergymen not connected with missions in Japan were present at most of the meetings and took part in the debates. The great end in view was to secure coöperation in the work of translating the Scriptures, and as a result of the deliberations of this convention the so-called Yokohama Translation Committee was organized. The translation of the New Testament now so widely circulated through all parts of the land was the work of this committee. Besides this, the main business, the question of union of forces was much discussd. Though but one church had been organized, the growing toleration of the Japanese government, evidences of which were numerous, and the deepening interest of the young students who even then flocked to the missionaries in considerable numbers, seemed to promise the rapid multiplication of churches. It was deemed possible to limit the evils of sectarianism by arranging for the consolidation of the work of the three missions represented in the convention. Little more was done, however, than to agree upon a simple creed and arrange for the adoption of the same names for church officers. This arrangement was afterwards abandoned, but for several years the churches associated with the American Board's Mission regularly appointed elders among their church officers. The fact that the work of the Presbyterian and Reformed Missions for many years was largely restricted to the immediate vicinity of Tokyo, while that of the American Board's Mission

did not extend very far from Kobe, some 300 miles to the westward of the capital, rendered any very close union unnatural and impracticable.

The first two missions, however, were drawn more and more closely together. Their missionaries lived in the same cities and on terms of the most intimate friendship; their converts oftentimes hardly knew to which mission their obligation was greater. In the mean while, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland had established a mission in Japan. This new mission from the beginning entered upon the most friendly relations with its sister missions of the Presbyterian family. Encouraged by the marked success which had attended the union at Amoy in southern China, between the churches of the Reformed (Dutch) Board and those of the English Presbyterian Mission, an arrangement was made in 1877 for the consolidation of the work of the three missions. In accordance with the plan adopted, each mission retained its distinct organization, but the churches which had grown up in connection with these missions became members of what was styled "The United Church of Christ in Japan."¹ The common work of the missions, both educational and evangelistic, has since been done in connection with this native church. In order to facilitate coöperation, there was organized a council of missionaries which served as a medium of communication between "The United Church" and the respective missions which could claim only an undivided share of the common work. As time went on, the influence of the union upon the different forms of work increased and the meetings of the presbytery, and subsequently of the synod, came to be the field for the weightiest debates in regard to aggressive Christian work. Subsequently the missions of the Reformed (German) Church in the United States and of the American Presbyterian Church (South) were added to this league. The advantages of this union have been felt more and more strongly every year. It has taken away the friction caused by divided

¹ In Japan, it has been customary, even in English discourse, to call this body by its Japanese name, "The Itchi Kyōkwai," while the Congregational churches have come to be called the Kumi-ai Kyōkwai, which the Congregationalists usually translate "The Associated Churches," but which a Presbyterian might with equal grammatical accuracy translate "The Church of Associations."

interests; it has given to the evangelists, both native and foreign, wider scope; the combination of forces has led to more extensive and better work than would otherwise have been possible; and last, but not least, these increased possibilities and larger plans have awakened a keener sense of responsibility which has exerted a most healthful influence upon all concerned.

A similar consolidation of the work of the American Protestant Episcopal Mission and the two British Societies, the Church Missionary Society and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, has been effected. A close alliance of the three principal Methodist Missions has also been arranged. These missions, those of the M. E. Church (North), the Methodist Church of Canada, and the M. E. Church (South), have entered upon a scheme of coöperation in certain lines of work, but do not as yet see their way to organic union, though many are earnestly desiring that such union may be speedily secured.

More comprehensive plans have been earnestly advocated. In 1887 a circular was sent by a committee of the Episcopal convention to the different missions in Japan, asking for a conference with a view to organic union. No formal announcement was made of the general scheme in the mind of the leaders of this movement. It was understood, however, that certain influential Episcopalians were ready to make the Presbyterian system the basis of the conference, but would propose the following modifications: —

(1) That while the general constitution of the presbyteries should not be interfered with, or their authority over the churches disturbed, each presbytery should have a bishop for its permanent moderator; (2) That reordination of the existing non-Episcopal ministry should not be insisted on, save in the case of candidates for the episcopate; (3) That while no objection would be made to the participation of the presbytery in the ceremony of ordination, the presence and coöperation of the moderator, *i. e.* the bishop, should be regarded as essential to the orderly observance of the rite.

These intimations of the attitude of the Episcopal Church which had preceded the formal invitation had awakened more

than ordinary interest, but certain infelicities attendant upon the sending out of the circulars of invitation caused so much of irritation that the whole matter was dropped.

While this broad scheme found little favor, the widespread desire for union to which it gave expression was not without fruit. For several years the Christians associated with the missions of the American Board and "The United (Presbyterian) Church of Japan" had been brought into specially close relations. The leaders in both were warm personal friends, and the methods employed in both were largely the same. They found this similarity of method, coöperating with other causes, was leading more and more to a sharpness of competition which did not exist between either side and other Christian bodies. This sharp competition caused no little anxiety to the Japanese Christians and the feeling grew upon them that the true remedy lay in consolidation. The movement started with the Japanese and was strongly urged by the most influential men in the Japanese ministry before the missionaries became interested in it. It was a common remark among them, that if it were not for the foreigners the Japanese Christians would speedily come together. So soon as the missionaries perceived how intent their Japanese brethren were upon this thought of union, they with few exceptions most cheerfully offered to do all in their power to aid the movement. Though for several years the matter had been more or less talked about, it was not until the spring of 1886 that anything of moment was actually done. The importance of a general discussion of the question was at that time so far admitted, that it was arranged to hold the meeting of the General Conference of the Kumi-ai (Congregational) Churches and the Synod of The United (Presbyterian) Church simultaneously in Tokyo, in May of the succeeding year, in order to secure a conference between the two bodies. In the mean time informal conferences were held, and the conviction that union was both feasible and necessary gained rapid currency, and great pains were taken to secure a full attendance of representative men at the May meetings. After full debate a committee of five¹ was appointed on each

¹ This joint committee is usually called the Committee of Ten. It was com-

side to draft a paper which should embody a basis of union. In due time these committees reported a scheme which with some modification was adopted in both assemblies with substantial unanimity, and arrangements were made by the Kumi-ai Conference to submit the plan to the local churches for their decision. A committee of ten persons from each side was appointed, with authority, in case the basis of union should be approved by three fourths of the churches, to draft a constitution for the contemplated new organization and to call special meetings of the Synod and General Conference respectively, with the proviso that the draft of the constitution should be submitted to the churches not less than six months before such special meeting. It was also provided that the churches should be allowed not less than three months for deliberation upon the basis of union, before it should come into the hands of the committee. The nature of this scheme will be explained in connection with the report of the Committee of Twenty.

During the following summer, a tentative draft of the constitution was prepared by a sub-committee and circulated as widely as circumstances would admit, and the principles involved were also fully discussed at an informal meeting of the American Board's Mission. It should be remarked that special pains had been taken to secure the presence on the committee of those representing the stanchest Congregational principles and who looked upon the movement with more or less of misgiving. Owing to the filling of two vacancies which subsequently occurred, the complexion of the committee was changed somewhat and rendered slightly more favorable to union, but it was considered, even with these changes, more conservative than the mission itself.

After considerable correspondence, the committee met in Osaka in February, 1888, spent some days in careful deliberation, and adopted, it is stated, without a dissenting vote, a full report, including a draft of a constitution and by-laws for the

posed, on the part of The United Church of Christ in Japan, of Rev. Messrs. K. Ibuka, M. Oshikawa, M. Uemura, K. Yoshioka, and Wm. Imbrie, and on the part of the Kumi-ai churches, of Rev. Messrs. S. T. Miyagawa, J. T. Ise, P. K. Kanamori, T. Matsuyama, and D. C. Greene.

proposed union organization, together with an appendix containing forms for the organization of churches, etc., for the guidance of those who might care to use them. The Congregational and Presbyterian sections of the committee, in pursuance of the instructions given them, issued calls for the General Conference and Synod respectively to meet in Osaka, November 23, 1888.

According to the report, the doctrinal basis of the organization was to be the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Articles of the Evangelical Alliance. It had been originally intended to require all ministers to assent to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Heidelberg Confession and the Plymouth Declaration in the qualified way suggested by the phrase "for substance of doctrine," but it was thought better on both sides to limit the required assent to the three symbols first mentioned. The alleged meagreness of this doctrinal basis called forth some vigorous protests for a time, especially from two Japanese ministers on the Presbyterian side who had been educated in America. The basis seemed to them to be so comprehensive as to cover the possibilities of many forms of error. The anxieties of these good brethren were not, perhaps, completely set at rest, but the opposition which they represented seems entirely to have disappeared.

As regards polity, the report embraced the following principles:—

(1) The local church was to be the unit of the organization, to be free to make and modify its own constitution, reserving to itself all powers not specifically given to other bodies; there was to be no legislative interference with its internal affairs.

(2) There were to be associations of local churches, called *bukwai*, composed of the pastor and one delegate from each church within their limits, and of all ordained ministers within the same limits, actually engaged in evangelistic work in connection with the *bukwai*, or in schools or seminaries associated with them. These bodies were to have the charge of ministerial standing, as similar bodies do in the United States, to have power to organize churches, to hear appeals from the churches under certain restrictions mentioned below.

(3) There were to be larger associations — *renkwai* — corresponding to state associations, made up in the same way of representatives from every church and ordained ministers actually engaged in evangelistic or educational work in connection with the *renkwai*. To these bodies was to be given power to appoint boards of missions, to assume charge of schools,¹ colleges, and theological seminaries, and to hear appeals from the decision of the *bukwai*, with the proviso that there should be no appeal to the *renkwai*, save in cases actually originating in the *bukwai*, with the same restriction as before (see below).

(4) There was to be a general association — *Sōkwai* — composed of an equal number of ministers and laymen appointed by the *bukwai*. This *Sōkwai* was to represent the unity of the church, make recommendations to the churches, “uphold truth and righteousness throughout the *renkwai*, *bukwai*, and churches,”² organize *renkwai* and hear appeals from them.

(5) One appeal was to be provided in judicial cases and only one. It was thought that there would be two classes of cases in which appeals would occur — one in which the feeling outside the church would be trifling, and in which a speedy adjustment would be the paramount consideration; the other class would comprise cases in which so much of excitement had arisen as to render it important to secure a tribunal considerably removed from local influences. The question to be settled was, How can the line be drawn between these two classes? The following plan was suggested: Whenever an appeal is made,

¹ This clause was inserted partly for the sake of recognizing the status of certain schools on the Presbyterian side, and partly because a similar plan had been so warmly advocated by several on the Congregational side that it seemed fit to provide for the possibility of such a change in the constitution of some of the Congregational schools, especially that of the Doshisha College. The large subscriptions (about \$70,000 silver) recently secured for this college from Japanese sources, on the basis of its present constitution, have since rendered any radical change decidedly inexpedient. The thought that this clause would, or could, be used to bring such schools under the control of the ecclesiastical organization against the wish of those in charge never entered the minds of the framers of the proposed constitution, nor do they admit it now.

² This expression gave great offense. It was thought by some to cover very indefinite powers; though the intention was merely to acknowledge the right of the *Sōkwai* to speak for the churches on moral and religious questions. It will probably be omitted because of its indefiniteness.

whether from the decision of a church or from that of a *bukwai*, the sense of the appellate body shall be first ascertained as to the expediency of hearing the appeal, and should one third of those present regard it inexpedient to hear it, the case shall be passed on to a standing committee of the next higher body,¹ but in either event the decision is to be final.

Some have described this arrangement as providing for a series of appeals. This is hardly correct. A series is a succession of co-related terms, but here, though provision is made for appeals from cases originating in three different bodies, the church, the *bukwai*, and the *renkwai*, there can never be a succession of appeals concerning the same grievance. This arrangement would not give the *bukwai* and *renkwai* control of the church, for any case heard on appeal must be judged in accordance with the constitution of the church; moreover, none of the friends of the union ever intended to admit appeals from a legislative act of a church, but only in cases of discipline, or those in which a church was alleged to have violated a definite constitutional pledge to do, or not to do, some thing, and then only when it resulted in a wrong to the appellant. This is, it is true, a concession to Presbyterianism, but the evil, if it be an evil, is reduced to its lowest terms. Here we have provided one appeal to a body worthy of full respect, in place of a possible three under the Presbyterian system. The freedom of the local church from all legislative interference, and its right of a direct vote on all constitutional questions (instead of voting through the *bukwai*) are substantial concessions to the Congregationalists which go far to compensate for the counter concessions which the judicial arrangements involve. It is understood further, that some of the most prominent men on the Presbyterian side stand ready to advocate the following amendments: (1) To relegate the sections relating to judicial procedure to the

¹ One critic has referred to this plan as follows: "Where did this government by minorities come from? From Presbyterianism or Buddhism, or what?" Is it possible that he has forgotten the power which the best parliamentary usage frequently gives to minorities to prevent action by a majority? That is all that this amounts to, and the arrangement is made in the interest of liberty. It must be admitted to be a convenient and substantially just means of securing a hearing at once prompt and fair.

Appendix, thus taking away their obligatory character ; (2) To restrict appeals to cases of discipline ; (3) To use instead of the term "appeal" some phrase of which "arbitrate" shall be the central word.

When the two bodies met in Osaka, November 23, the Synod was prepared to act promptly and accepted the report of the Committee of Twenty with some slight amendments, and arranged for the consummation of the union. In the General Conference, however, matters did not run so smoothly. Several churches declined to send representatives on the ground that sufficient time had not been allowed for deliberation. Some churches which sent delegates withheld from them the power of voting on the burning question — they were sent to see and to hear and to report. At the outset, there had been less opposition on the Congregational side than on the Presbyterian, but certain papers which had appeared in "The Pacific" and "The Advance," together with the action of the State Associations of California and Nebraska protesting against the plan and intimating there was danger of the withdrawal of funds, were followed by a series of papers by Messrs. S. L. and O. H. Gulick, laying great stress on the Presbyterian features of the plan. Their picture of the evils of Presbyterianism as they viewed it was very vivid and staggered some of the best friends of union for a time. Several days were spent in discussion, earnest and warm, but useful in clearing up misunderstandings. Nearly all of the prominent Japanese ministers spoke strongly in favor of union, but all acquiesced in the wisdom of postponing final action until the regular meeting of the conference in May, 1889.

In viewing this scheme from the standpoint of a Congregationalist, it is not strange that the judicial arrangements should be seen in a strong light, and be looked upon as a harmful limitation of the rights of the church. It should not be forgotten, however, that to call it tyranny, as has been done, is a perversion of terms, for the whole judicial arrangement is a defense of individual liberty, as against the local church, or of the local church, as regards an unconstitutional act of the *bukwai*. With the amendment which the Presbyterians seem ready to accept, the judicial machinery could not be set in motion except at the instance of an aggrieved individual.

That a local church can under the influence of excitement and prejudice override the rights of its members, and refuse to submit its decisions to the review of a council, the history of Congregationalism plainly shows. This plea for the liberty of the local church is not always a plea for liberty in it. This is not saying that Congregationalism may not be the better system, but simply that the question is not to be settled off hand by an *ex parte* appeal to history.

The fact that the *bukwai* are made guardians of ministerial standing ought not to excite criticism, since in this regard the plan coincides with that advocated by Dr. Ross, of which the "Bibliotheca Sacra" says: "It is no longer the theory of one man, but the officially adopted method of the principal States of the land."¹ That which is a recognized feature of allowed Congregationalism is not open to fair criticism in a compromise measure, especially when the same writer, apparently a full believer in the *jure divino* theory of Congregationalism, can say, a little farther on: "Our author claims that ministerial standing cannot be held in the unassociated churches of any locality and assigns a number of reasons for this. The historical argument, that, in fact, the old method did not work successfully, would have been a stronger one and more satisfactory had the limits of Dr. Ross's work permitted him to go into it."² Dr. Ross himself would carry the power of these associations of churches so far as to give the right to expel unacceptable ministers and recalcitrant churches from its membership and thus practically from the denomination, with only the restraint which comes from the moral influence of an advisory, possibly merely an *ex parte*, council.³

Attention has been called to the alleged abnormal clerical influence in the proposed church councils. As a matter of fact, the number of ministers cannot be in excess for many years to come. There may, perhaps, be occasional meetings in which ministers will be in the majority, but it will be for many, many years to come quite within the power of the churches to secure

¹ *Bib. Sac.* July, 1888, p. 545.

² *Ibid.* p. 545.

³ Ross's *Lectures on Congregationalism*, cf. pp. 163, 301, 279.

a large majority of laymen in all their deliberative bodies,¹ save the *Sōkwai*, which under the proposed amendment will have no judicial functions, and will have little more power than the National Council of Congregational Churches in the United States. Whatever those may say who look mainly at the theoretical aspects of the matter, the writer after a service of several years as the executive officer of the Evangelistic Committee of the mission of the American Board and often obliged to act for the committee in distant parts of the field, feels bound to express with emphasis his firm conviction that in this regard the new plan will work great benefit. There has been no graver ecclesiastical question suggested by the recent history of the Congregational churches in Japan than that touching the growing influence of irresponsible men, *i. e.* men not definitely charged with the responsibility which comes from official position, upon the coöperative work of the churches. This is not said by way of depreciation, for the writer entertains a most profound respect for the personal character of these men and very large confidence in their practical wisdom; the brilliant success which they have gained has won his admiration; but, nevertheless, the system which has seemed to necessitate these measures, however adequate it may appear in communities which inherit the traditions of the English Commonwealth, sometimes, among less aggressive peoples, fails of the very end which its advocates seek to attain. The writer may be wrong in his inference, but he is influenced in his advocacy of the proposed scheme by the belief that it will place a more definite responsibility upon the lay element of the churches and give that element a larger share in the plans of the community of churches than it has ever had before.

This plan, while it safeguards the liberties of the individual as regards the church, and the church as regards the association of churches, avoids the weakness of Congregationalism which hands the common work of its churches over to voluntary societies, which, because they are voluntary, are beyond the limits of their direct control.

¹ Among the Congregational churches of Japan there were at last accounts but twenty-seven pastors for forty-three churches. It will be impossible to furnish ordained men fast enough to improve the proportion very much.

In this review, the attention has been necessarily restricted to the spirit of the contemplated constitution. The principles here discussed are those which its framers desired to maintain. Details which seem inconsistent with these principles can readily be modified. On neither side is there any disposition to magnify details. To compare the movement with the so-called "Plan of Union" in the West and to predict failure, because that failed, is to misapprehend the whole scheme. It is not an attempt to secure a *modus vivendi* between members of more or less antagonistic bodies, but it aims at the practically complete consolidation of the antagonistic bodies themselves and will be abandoned, unless it can be adopted with something approaching to unanimity on both sides.

By the opponents of this scheme great use has been made of the alleged divisive and centralizing tendencies of Presbyterianism, as exhibited in its history, as an argument against the proposed constitution. But it must not be overlooked, that a historical argument which makes no account of the spirit of the age and the counter tendencies which that spirit fosters is of little value. That the strong movements, even in purely Presbyterian organizations, are certainly at present towards union and a larger lay influence, can hardly be denied.

Such has been the marvelous growth¹ of the work of recent years that in the near future the worst evils of denominationalism threaten to be upon the Japanese churches. Even now more or less serious friction has arisen. Besides such causes of irritation, there is under the present system an artificial restraint upon the evangelists which often amounts to a most unhappy limitation of their work. On missionary ground, perhaps more than in Christian lands, Christian work must follow the lines of personal influence, and these lines do not always bend to suit the arrangements of missions or churches. It is true that union between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists will not stop the evils of denominationalism, but it will lessen them in large degree. If it be an evil to have friction

¹ It can hardly be an excessive estimate if the whole number of Protestant Christians be placed at 28,000 or 29,000, and of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians at 18,000.

at a hundred points, it is an important gain if that number be reduced to fifty. The two bodies number more than three fifths of all the Protestant Christians in Japan, and it is understood that in case of union the Cumberland Presbyterians will cast in their lot with the new organization.

It is further true, that friction between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists when in direct competition is almost invariably sharper than between either one and other denominations. It is because, in practice, however great may be the emphasis by ecclesiastical writers upon their points of difference, neither ministers nor laymen put great stress upon them. Both pass from one denomination to the other with no sense of sacrificed principle. The two bodies are rivals working on the same, or nearly the same, plane. The irritation caused by the recent use of the funds of the Presbyterian Church Extension Board to build up Presbyterian churches in New England illustrates the great sensitiveness of these denominations in their mutual relations.

Both native Christians and missionaries would have been glad of a more comprehensive union, but the time was not yet ripe. They have taken what they regard as the statesman-like course of attacking the point where the evils they wish to cure are the worst, partly because they are the worst, and partly because the very causes which make them so seem to involve the promise of relief through consolidation. The consolidation, if effected, will lead to far greater economy of men and money and will thus hasten the day of complete financial independence, and will give greater efficiency to every department of missionary work.

Among the members of other denominations, opinions may differ with regard to this scheme. There may be those, possibly, who think they see in it reason to fear a more stalwart attitude toward Christians of other names, but one good Methodist brother gave expression to his feelings by saying, "I would cut off my right hand sooner than do anything to impede such a glorious movement."

The large majority both of missionaries and of the Japanese Christians regard this movement as fraught with great promise.

The moderator of the synod, when the time came to put the final motion for the adoption of the committee's report, was completely broken down, so great was his sense of the deep meaning of the pending question; his voice failed him and he was forced to retire from the chair.

In America such a union is outside the realm of practical church politics, but can it be that the influence of American Christians is to be used, as some are urging, to thwart this movement and to perpetuate a system which threatens in a few years to plant, even in the smaller towns of Japan, three or four competing churches at the sacrifice of nobler work?

DANIEL CROSBY GREENE.

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